

# Creating TANF and Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Partnerships

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*Some TANF recipients may have disabilities that would qualify them for the specialized employment preparation services Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies provide. TANF recipients may seek out VR services on their own, or be referred to VR by a TANF case manager on his or her own accord, however, because VR is an unfamiliar service system, few may be inclined to do so. Creating a formal partnership between the agencies can ensure that all TANF recipients who can benefit from VR services have access to them. Though linking the services of these two agencies through formal cooperative agreements is not a widespread strategy, some states have had such partnerships in place for many years and other states are developing them. This practice brief explores the benefits and challenges of linking TANF and VR services, describes partnerships that have been formed in Vermont and Iowa, then discusses key features that appear to be critical to developing a successful partnership.*

## INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the nation's cash assistance system into a temporary assistance system that includes work requirements, sanctions for noncompliance, and time limits has increased the importance of providing services that will help all TANF recipients, including those living with a disability, quickly obtain and maintain competitive employment. TANF employment programs typically offer job search assistance, case management to monitor participation in required program activities and, to varying degrees, opportunities to participate in work experience, community service, and vocational education programs. Individuals living with disabilities, however, may have service needs that go beyond those that TANF programs typically provide. Examples include intensive case management, rehabilitation services, assistive technologies, substance abuse and mental health treatment, counseling, and job matching and coaching. While some TANF programs help recipients access mental health and substance abuse treatment and provide more intensive case management to help recipients address personal and family challenges, most don't have the resources or expertise to provide the full array of services individuals living with disabilities might need to succeed in the workplace. One way to make these services available is to link TANF recipients with agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) that specialize in providing these services.

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

This is one of four practice briefs examining strategies TANF agencies may consider implementing to help TANF recipients living with a disability to realize their full employment potential. Other briefs in the series include, *Conducting In-Depth Assessments, Creating Work Opportunities, and Providing Specialized Personal and Work-Based Support*. These briefs draw on case studies of nine programs that have been implemented by states or county welfare agencies to provide specialized services to TANF recipients living with a disability who have not succeeded in traditional job search programs. None of these programs has been rigorously evaluated, thus, their effectiveness remains unknown. Still, they provide important information on program design and implementation that program administrators can use to craft strategies that take into account their program goals and the unique features of their TANF caseload. These briefs were completed by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. under contract to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Administration for Children and Families.













